

## **J1. Central Office Administration**

Current Washington Policy. Washington currently provides administrative staff at the rate of 4 certified Administrative Staff for every 1000 FTE, or one per every 250 student FTEs. This allocation is designed to cover both site and central office administrative staff. Our goal is to identify administrative staff by both position (principal, assistant principal, superintendent, assistant superintendent, business officer, etc.) and location (school and central office). This section addresses district level certified administrative staff.

Evidence: The district office has the responsibility to organize and manage all aspects of the district including the curriculum and instructional program, as well as to implement national, state, and local reforms, oversee budgets, and provide necessary materials, equipment, facilities, and repairs to the schools. Its ultimate purpose is to facilitate and support the educational program at schools so that teachers are able to teach and students are able to learn. The reform group, School Communities that Work (2002), succinctly states the purposes of the central office: equity and results. The group elaborates that equity—what others may prefer to call adequacy—means to provide varying resources based on individual student’s needs so that all will demonstrate achievement results. In the Washington context, the prime goals of the central office are to provide leadership for the district and insure that the district office and its schools function as an integrated system focused on increased student achievement through improved instructional practice in the core content areas.

The Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform (Burch & Spillane, 2004), sees a district office’s primary responsibility as facilitating and encouraging an exchange

of information and expertise among schools and among instructional leaders. Burch and Spillane (2004) view with special significance the mid-level district staff, who exist primarily in larger districts and whose job it is to translate “big ideas like ‘improving literacy district-wide’ or ‘closing the achievement gap’ into strategies, guidelines, and procedures that are handed down to schools” (p. 1).<sup>1</sup> This is consistent with the content leaders that are part of Washington’s reading and mathematics programs. In providing these leadership and interpretive roles, district staff members can hinder or assist the efforts of classroom teachers and site administrators, and their success and assistance can mean increased achievement for children.

Some question whether or not central offices are necessary to the operation of a school district. Berg and Hall’s (1997) study of central offices that had downsized and the effects of that restructured environment over a three-year period provides important evidence to support the relevance of a central office. The districts studied had downsized as a way to reduce costs due to budget constraints and in response to public criticism of bloated bureaucracies. What Berg and Hall found over the three years of the study was that initially districts seemed to take the central office reduced-staff changes in stride and even relished the idea of being more productive and efficient. Later, the euphoria employees felt often turned to burn-out as so much more individual effort and time was required to complete important tasks. Often, tasks that could no longer be completed at the district level were sent to principals, thus leaving them with fewer hours to be instructional leaders. The principals who were interviewed expressed feeling deserted by the central office. Some districts studied had hired back retirees temporarily or part-time

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<sup>1</sup> In some Washington districts, such mid-level managers do not exist due to the small size of the district. In such districts, this responsibility would fall to the central office administrators the district chooses to hire.

as a cost-effective way to meet the demands on staff due to growing student populations or new state mandates regarding standards and assessment. The researchers reasoned that central offices are not irrelevant as some critics have insisted.

Berg and Hall (1997) conclude that central offices are necessary to complete several essential tasks, which otherwise would need to be accomplished by site personnel. One of their main findings is that the workload for these particular site personnel had become so exhausting as to be detrimental to the core purpose of teaching and learning. The researchers also find that without a fully functioning central office, districts tend to recreate one at each site, which not only diverted personnel from the core function of instruction but also reduced the efficiency they were seeking.

Relying on personal experience and consultant work, DuFour (2003) argued that central district offices are essential to the operation of a school district. She suggested that central offices can be effective role models of a learning community focusing on student improvement if they limit the number of district goals or initiatives to one or two and have their staff members all contribute toward that goal or goals. DuFour emphasized the importance of central offices as service oriented centers whose staff members collaborate and focus on results. Again these broader research conclusions are consistent with Washington's call for district leadership in each of the core content areas.

Flynn (1998) claimed the central office's primary role is to prepare site personnel to make decisions, largely around curriculum and instructional issues. He provides details from his own district that was restructured to provide the typical support and guidance roles to principals as well as monitoring and auditing functions. He stated that

the central office must teach collegiality and cooperative relationship building so that students will benefit from the site-based decision-making model.

Indeed, as schools and districts implement versions of standards-based education reform around the country, a new appreciation for the roles of good central offices is emerging. Although the practices of many central offices fall far short of what is desired, there are virtually no proposals for eliminating central offices. Thus, the issue becomes one of design; what should the size and composition of central offices be?

The difficulty here is that little research exists to help determine what an appropriate staffing configuration might be. The problem is complicated by the frequent employment of special education administrators and federally funded administrators in district offices – many of whom are funded partially with district funds and partially with Federal and/or special education funds.

We are aware of two efforts to correct this deficiency in the research literature. In our work in Kentucky (Picus, Odden & Fermanich, 2003), we held a professional judgment panel session that attempted to estimate the appropriate staffing pattern for a prototype school district of 3,500 pupils. The discussion bogged down over how to treat administrators for categorical programs, and a satisfactory solution to the question of appropriate numbers of central office administrators was not reached. Instead, we relied on the average per pupil spending for central administration and applied that average to each district in the state.

Recently, however, under the direction of Lawrence O. Picus, an Ed.D. student at the Rossier School of Education at the University of Southern California completed a series of focus groups in California that considered the issue of staffing for a school

district's central office (Swift, 2005). Using a prototype district of 3,500 students, the focus groups suggested the central office staffing pattern depicted in Figure x.

**Figure x**  
**Composition of a Central District Office for a District with 3,500 Students:**  
**Results from Four Professional Focus Groups**

Position Title
1 Superintendent (admin) 1 Assistant Superintendent (admin) 1 Executive Assistant (clerical) 1 Personnel Technician (clerical)
1 Director of Curriculum and Instruction (admin) 1 Director of Pupil Services/Special Ed (admin) 1 Nurse (professional) 1 Secretary—Special Ed (clerical) 1 Data Steward (clerical) 1 Clerk (clerical)
1 Business Manager (admin) 1 Payroll Clerk (clerical) 1 Accounts Payable Clerk (clerical)
1 Director of Technology (admin) 1 Media Technician I (tech) 1 Media Technician III (tech)
1 Director of Maintenance/Operations (professional) 1 Maintenance Worker (support) 2 grounds keepers (support) 1 Director of Food Services (professional)

The panelists identified four primary functions of a central office:

- District leadership

- Instructional leadership
- Business Operations
  - Budgeting and finance
  - Personnel
  - Maintenance and operations
- Technology

Using the model developed by Swift's focus groups (Swift, 2005) the central office of a 3,500 student district would include 6 administrative positions, 3 professional positions, and 12 clerical, technical or support positions. Both of the computer technical support positions can be eliminated because the proposed Washington evidence-based prototypical school models include 0.1 technical support position for every 100 students in the instructional facilitator allocation at the school levels. The one maintenance worker and two groundskeepers also can be eliminated because those positions will be included in the recommendations for operation and maintenance. Since food services is not being addressed and is assumed to operate on a self sustaining basis, and food services costs would include a central office food services director, we also can drop that position as well. That leaves us with 6 administrative positions, 2 professional positions and 7 clerical positions.

After querying several districts of around 3500 students in Wisconsin, we would suggest upgrading the position of personnel technician to a director of human resources in the business office and adding a secretary for that position. We also would eliminate the nurse position, assuming that kind of more specialized position could be provided in a larger district. Finally, we would provide the Director of Operations and Maintenance

with a secretary. Thus, our recommended central office design is in Figure xx. This model would provide 8 administrative/professional and 9 secretarial/clerk positions for the central office for a district with 3500 students.

For the average Washington district of 2000 students, this model would provide 4.6 senior administrative and 5.14 secretarial positions, and half that, or 2.3 senior administrative and 2.57 secretarial positions for the 1000 student district. Prorating up to the 7000 and 14,000 student district would provide 16 and 32 administrative/professional and 18 and 36 secretarial positions, respectively. It could be that central office staff resources could be less for larger districts given possible economies of large size, but we would like to discuss that issue with the K-12 Advisory Committee, and administrative leaders in large Washington school districts at the Professional Judgment Panels that will be held in late April.

**Figure xx**  
**Proposed Central Office Staffing for a District with 3500 Students**

	<b>Superintendent Office</b>	<b>Business Office</b>	<b>Curriculum and Pupil Support</b>	<b>Technology</b>	<b>Operations and Maintenance</b>
<b>Administrative</b>	1 Superintendent 1 Asst. Super.	1 Business Manager 1 Human Resources Manager	1 Director special Ed 1 Director Pupil Services	1 Director of Technology	
<b>Professional</b>					1 Director of Maintenance/Operations
<b>Clerical</b>	2 Senior Secretaries	1 Payroll Clerk 1 Accounts Payable Clerk 1 Sr. Sec.	2 Senior Secretaries 1 Secretary		1 Secretary

In addition to these staff positions, the central office would need resources for supplies, materials, equipment, legal and insurance, and other miscellaneous items. We estimate at this point is that this would total \$300 per pupil.

Recommendation. We tentatively recommend that the central office staffing be based on the above identified resources for the 3,500 student prototypical district, (prorated according to actual district size) to which we add \$300 per pupil for miscellaneous expenses such as legal expenses, insurance, materials, supplies board of education expenses and other central office functions. We will modify this preliminary recommendation on the basis of discussion and feedback with the K-12 Advisory Committee and the Professional Judgment panels.